

Being Human and Being Organized

*Organizational efficiency
can stifle human development*

It is hard to imagine being “civilized” without being “organized.” Yet too much organization, or the wrong kind, can injure the individuals involved and through them can spoil an organization or a civilization. How can we design or “grow” organizations that maintain the right balance between individual needs on the one hand, and organizational requirements on the other?

The classical design for a formal organization has some very serious flaws. The nature of these flaws appears when we set side by side two pictures: first, a view of how human beings need to behave in our society in order to be healthy, productive, growing individuals; and second, how a formal organization (a factory, business, or hospital) requires them to behave. Comparing these pictures, we see that the organization’s requirements, as presented by “classical” descriptions, are sharply opposed to the individual’s needs. We can, however, suggest some lines along which action and study might improve the “fit” between the human being and the non-human organization.

Picture of Health

There are certain lines along which the child becoming a man develops, in our culture. We can discuss, as being most important, seven of these “developmental dimensions:”

- From being passive as infants, humans grow toward activeness as adults.
- From being dependent on others, an individual grows toward being relatively independent of others. He develops the ability to “stand on his own two feet” while at the same time acknowledging a healthy dependency. He does not react to others (his boss, for instance) in terms of patterns learned during childhood; thus, such

independence is partly a matter of accurate perception of himself and those around him.

- From only a few types of reaction or behavior, he develops many.
- He moves from the shallow, brief, and erratic interests of his infancy to the intense, long-term, and coherent commitments of adulthood. He requires increasingly varied challenges; he wants his tasks to be not easy but hard, not simple but complex, not a collection of separate things but a variety of parts he can put together.
- He begins to want long-term challenges that link his past and future, in place of the old brief and unconnected jobs which typically were engaged in by him as a child.
- He begins wanting to go up the totem pole, instead of staying in the low place a child has.
- He develops from being not very self-aware and impulsive to being both self-aware and self-controlled, and this lets him develop a sense of integrity and self-worth.

No one, of course, finishes his development along these seven lines. For one thing, if everyone became totally independent, incessantly active, and completely equal if not superior, society would be in a pretty difficult situation—sort of all fleas and no dog. One function of culture is to hold back, by our manners and morals, the self-expression of some individualists, so that others may also have a chance at self-development. Then too, people simply differ in needs and skills; not everybody wants to go into orbit, and some are too frail, too fat, or too stupid to be given the chance.

Admitting, then, that no one is ever through developing along these dimensions, we can still say that his self-actualization is the overall “profile”

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of how far he has developed along them. At this point we must add that in drawing this profile, not the surface appearance but the underlying meanings of a man's behavior are what have to be considered. For instance, an employee might seem to be always going against what management wants, so that people call him "independent," yet his contrariness may be due to his great need to be dependent on management, a need he dislikes to admit. The truly independent person is the one whose behavior is not mainly a reaction against the influence others have over him (though, of course, no person is totally independent). The best test of such independence is how fully the person will let other people be independent and active. Autocratic leaders may claim to like independent underlings, yet many studies have shown that autocratic leadership only makes both boss and underlings more dependence-ridden.

The Formal Organization

We turn now from the picture of a developing self to the organization. What are its properties, and what impact can we expect these to make on the human personality we have just viewed? What reactions can we expect from this impact?

To begin, the most basic feature of a formal organization is that it is "rational"—that is, it has been "designed," and its parts are purposefully related within this design; it has pattern and is shaped by human minds to accomplish particular rational objectives. For instance, jobs within it must be clearly defined (in terms of rank, salary, and duties) so that the organization can have logical training, promotion, and resignation or retirement policies.

But most experts on such organizations are not content to point to, as Herbert Simon does, this "rational design"—they go on to say that this rationality, though an ideal that may have to be modified now and then, requires people in an organization to be very loyal to its formal structure if it is to work effectively. They have to "go by the rules." And the experts claim such design is "more human" in the long run than creating an organization haphazardly. It is senseless, cruel, wasteful, and inefficient, they argue, not to have a logical design. It is senseless to pay a man highly without clearly defining his position and its relation to the whole. It is cruel, because eventually people suffer when no structure exists.

It is wasteful because without clearly pre-defined jobs it is impossible to plan a logical training or promotion or resignation or retirement policy. And it is inefficient because it allows the "personal touch" to dominate and this, in turn, is "playing politics."

In contrast to such experts, some human-relations researchers have unfortunately given the impression that formal structures are bad, and that individual needs should come first in creating and running an organization. These latter men, however, are swinging (as recent analysis of their research has shown) to recognize that an extreme emphasis on the individual's needs is not a very tenable position either, and that organizational rules can be well worth keeping.

Principles of Design

What are the principles by which an organization is "rationally designed?" The traditionalists among experts in this field have singled out certain key assumptions about the best design for a formal organization. In our comments here these will be dealt with not as beyond question but only as the most useful and accurate so far offered. By accepting them to this extent, we can go on to look at the probable impact on human beings of an organization based on them.

As Gillespie suggests, these principles may be traced back to certain "principles of industrial economics," the most important of which is that "the concentration of effort on a limited field of endeavor increases quality and quantity of output." This principle leads to another: that the more similar the things that need doing, the more specialization will help to do them.

Specializing

The design-principle just mentioned carries three implications about human beings within organizations. First, that the human personality will behave more efficiently as the job gets more specialized. Second, that there can be found a one best way to define the job so it will be done faster. Third, that differences between human personalities may be ignored by transferring more skill and thought to machines.

But all these assumptions conflict sharply with the developmental needs or tendencies of human personality as a growing thing; a human being is always putting himself together, pushing himself into the future. How can we assume that this process can be choked off, or that the differences between individuals which result from the process can be ignored?

Besides, specialization requires a person to use only a few of his abilities, and the more specialized the task the simpler the ability involved. This goes directly counter to the human tendency to want more complex, more interesting jobs as he develops. Singing the same tune over and over is boring enough, but repeating the same note is absolutely maddening.

The Chain of Command

Mere efficiency of parts is not enough; an organization needs to have a pattern of parts, a chain of command. Thus, planners create "leadership," to control and coordinate. They assume that efficiency is increased by a fixed hierarchy of authority. The man at the top is given formal power to hire and fire, reward and penalize, so that employees will work for the organization's objectives.

The impact of this design-feature on human personality is clearly to make the individuals dependent on, passive and subordinate to, the leader. The results are obviously to lessen their self-control and shorten their time-perspective. It would seem, then, that the design-feature of hierarchic structure works against four of the growth-lines, pushing individuals back from active toward passive, from equal toward subordinate, from self-controlled toward dependent, from being aware of long time-perspectives toward having only a short time-perspective. In all these four ways, the result is to move employees back from adulthood toward immaturity.

Planners have tried to cushion this impact in several ways. First, they see to it that those who perform well in the hierarchy are rewarded. But the trouble with this is that the reward ought to be psychological as well as material—and yet, because of the job-specialization which simplifies and does not satisfy a worker, few psychological rewards are possible. So the material reward has to seem more important, and has to be increased. To



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do this, however, means that one does nothing about the on-the-job situation that is causing the trouble, but instead pays the employee for the dissatisfaction he experiences. Obviously, management in doing this leaves an employee to feel that basic causes of dissatisfaction are built into industrial life, that the rewards received are wages for dissatisfaction, and that any satisfaction to be gained must be looked for outside the organization.

Other things are wrong with raising wages to make up for dissatisfaction. For it assumes that the worker can so split himself up that he can be quite satisfied with the anomalous situation we have just described him as being in. Second, it assumes he is mainly interested in what money can get. And third, it assumes he is best rewarded as an individual producer, without regard to the work group in which he belongs. This may well mean that a worker whose group informally sanctions holding production down will therefore have to choose between pleasing the boss and getting paid more, or pleasing his fellows and getting paid less.

Keeping Personalities Out

A second "solution" has been suggested by planners: to have very good bosses. The leaders, that is, should be objective, rational, and personify the reasonableness of the organizational structure. To do this means they keep from getting emotionally involved; as one executive states, "We must try to keep our personalities out of the job." Evaluating others, he sets aside his own feelings. And, of course, he must be loyal to the organization.

But this solution too violates some of the basic properties of personality. To split what one does from what one is, or to ask others to do it, is to violate one's self-integrity, and the same goes for the effort to keep personality out of the job. (As for impartiality, as May has pointed out, the best way to be impartial is to be as partial as one's needs require but stay aware of this partiality so as to "correct" for it at the moment of decision.)

One other solution has been offered: to encourage competition among employees, so as to get them to show initiative and creativity. Competing for promotions, this "rabble hypothesis" suggests, will increase the efficiency of the competitors.

Williams, however, conducting some controlled experiments, show that this assumption is not necessarily valid for people placed in competitive situations. Deutsch supports Williams' results with

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extensive controlled research, and goes much further, suggesting that competitive situations make for so much tension that they lessen efficiency. Levy and Freedman confirm Deutsch's work and go on to relate competition to psychoneurosis.

Unity of Direction

We have looked at the design-features of job-specialization and hierarchic structure. A final principle of design is *unity of direction*: efficiency is supposed to increase if each administrative unit has a single activity planned and directed by a single leader. The implication is that this leader sets the goal, the conditions for meeting the goal, and the path toward it, for all his employees. If, because of job-specialization, the workers are not personally interested in the work-goal, then unity of direction creates the ideal conditions for psychological failure. For each individual basically (as we have said) aims at psychological success, which comes only when he defines his own goals, in relation to his personal needs and to the difficulties of reaching the goals.

Human Needs vs. Organizational Requirements

What we have seen is that if we use the principles of formal organization as ideally defined, employees will be working in an environment where (1) they have little or no control over their workaday world; (2) they are expected to be passive, dependent, and subordinate; (3) they are expected to have a short time-perspective; (4) job-specialization asks them to perfect and value only a few of their simplest abilities; and (5) they are asked to produce under conditions (imposed by the principle of unity of direction) ideal for psychological failure.

Since behavior in these ways is more childish than adult, it appears that formal organizations are willing to pay high wages and provide adequate seniority if mature adults will, for eight hours a day, behave like children. It is obvious that such behavior is incompatible with the human need to develop and "grow up." And it appears that the incongruity increases as (1) the employee is of greater maturity; (2) the formal structure is tightened in search of efficiency; (3) one goes down the line of command; (4) jobs become more mechanized.

That such incongruity will result in frustration, failure, short time-perspective and conflict hardly

needs demonstration. How, in the face of all this, will the employee be able to maintain a sense of his own integrity? He will react in part like a turtle and in part like a porcupine: by leaving, by "ladder-climbing" within the organization, by such defense reactions as daydreaming, aggression, ambivalence, regression, projection, and so on; or by becoming apathetic toward the organization's makeup and goals. If this occurs, he will be apt to start "goldbricking" or even cheating. He may create informal groups who agree that it is right to be apathetic and uninvolved, and these informal groups may become formalized—instead of just gathering to gripe they will hold meetings and pass resolutions. Or he may take the view that money and "what's in it for me" have become the really important things about his work, and the "psychological rewards" are just malarkey. And he will end up by indoctrinating the new employees so that they will see the organization through the same mud-colored glasses as he does.

What to Do?

There is only one real way to improve the sad picture described above: by *decreasing* the dependency, decreasing the subordination, and decreasing the submissiveness expected of employees. It can be shown that making a job "bigger"—not more specialized and small—will help do these things; and that employee-centered (or democratic or participative) leadership also will improve the situation.

Yet, these remedies are limited, for they require employees who are already highly interested in the organization. And the situation which makes them needed is one in which employees are anything but interested. In such a situation, strongly directive leadership is almost necessary to get the apathetic employee to move at all. This in its own turn, helps to create the very problem it is trying to solve!

An Unresolved Dilemma

The dilemma, then, is basic and is a continuing challenge to the social scientist and the leader in an organization. They may well begin their efforts to work for a solution—one in which the organization will be as efficient as possible, while the people in it will be as free and strongly developing as possible—by considering two facts. The first is that no organization can be maximally efficient that stunts its own vital parts. And the second is that our culture and each of its institutions, from family through nations and beyond, are one vast interlocking set of organizations. ■